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Interview with Ann DuPre

Ann DuPre
SC Mother of the Year Committee

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Winthrop University
South Carolina Mother of the Year Award Oral History Archives
Interview Transcript
Ann DuPre
Member of the SC Mother of the Year Award Selection Committee
May 14, 2015

Dr. Disney: Okay, this is Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney. I am here interviewing Mrs. Ann DuPre, a member of the South Carolina Mother of the Year Award Selection Committee. Ann, welcome and thank you so much for being with us here today.

Ann DuPre: Well, thanks to Winthrop for doing this wonderful project.

Dr. Disney: Well, thank you. We're so happy to have you here in the home of Mrs. Ann Edwards. It's wonderful to be here.

Ann DuPre: It is. Absolutely.

Dr. Disney: Well, why don't you start by telling us a little about when and where you were born and raised?

Ann DuPre: Alright, I was born in Summerville, South Carolina – I was raised there, and Summerville was a very small town there, then in those days.

Dr. Disney: Why don't you tell us a little bit about your family, education, and early childhood experience?

Ann DuPre: Well, Summerville was like a fairyland for children, it was so small. Y'know, we'd play all day long and nobody really worried about where we were – if we didn't show up at supper time, then they'd look for us. Yes, small southern town, wonderful experience. I am the oldest sister of twins. I was an only child for eight years and then my mother had twins, so that was quite an experience for me. I was no longer the princess adored person because two babies moved in! And...and I treasure my brother and sister, but it was difficult.

Dr. Disney: Absolutely, that's a transition.

Ann DuPre: Right, right. Um, I finished Summerville High School and then I went off to Burnell College for two years and transferred to the University of South Carolina. I have an Elementary Education degree and then did my Master's in Elementary Education at the College of Charleston. And I always wanted to be a teacher. Of course, in my day, there were very few opportunities for women so it was, y'know, it wasn't this wide open in occupations, careers that women have today. But I really, I taught school for thirty-five years which was wonderful. Most of it with learning disabled, emotionally disabled children and working with low income children also. I spent several years working in a disadvantaged school and that was a wonderful experience. I worked with children who had reading problems and then I would work with their parents and train them in how to help the children at home – playing games with them, reading books – just to enhance their educational experience. I like that population, I felt like I was making an impact.

Dr. Disney: So tell me about when you met your husband and when you began to start your family.

Ann DuPre: I met him the spring of my junior year at Carolina – he didn't go to Carolina, he was at NC State and had friends down there and we went to the Carolina Cup together. And then he ended up at Carolina summer school and we started dating then. I taught school for almost two years and we were married and went to San Diego, which was a wonderful experience. In those days, California was another world compared to South Carolina. I was just amazed at the

differences, my entire wardrobe was out of date as soon as I arrived. And I don't think it's like that now.

Dr. Disney: How long were you in San Diego?

Ann DuPre: Two years.

Dr. Disney: Did you come back to South Carolina after that?

Ann DuPre: We did – moved to Mount Pleasant in 1973 and have been living in the old village ever since. My daughter was born in 1978, I continued teaching and I – that was difficult – I didn't want to give up my career and so managing a child, a career, a husband who had a job and was often out of town, it was a lot to juggle. I was very fortunate in that my daughter went to the elementary school where I taught so she would come to my classroom in the afternoon and work on her homework or I would get her to whatever after school things she needed to go to and often that was right in the school so that really made things a lot easier. I don't know how people do it when they don't have that little extra like I had. Really, one way to manage a career and raising a family, I vowed I would never take anything home. Now I had to break that rule from time to time but we would stay in the classroom 'til maybe five o'clock and that way, I separated career from family and that worked for somebody like me.

Dr. Disney: That's really good, that's so helpful. I'm a college professor at Winthrop and I end up doing a lot of my work at home at nights and on weekends and it's hard to balance. But as teachers, that's still one of the best jobs, I think, for women to try to have balance, right? Work and home –

Ann DuPre: Plus, you have your summers where you can spend your time with your child.

Dr. Disney: Exactly. What does motherhood mean to you?

Ann DuPre: Oh my goodness, I think it's the most wonderful thing in the world. It's such a wonderful dimension, I think it takes – it took me from being focused on myself in to giving to another person. And I find grandmotherhood even better! It's just the best in the world, just to enjoy that wonderful child and not having all the time constraints of being a working mother – all the time constraints I had in my life.

Dr. Disney: How did you first become a member of the South Carolina Mother of the Year selection committee?

Ann DuPre: Well Ann Edwards approached me and she asked me to gather – they were interested in me – and I cobbled together a resume and she took it to the board and they seemed to like it and I became a member and it's been a wonderful experience.

Dr. Disney: Can you talk a little about what that experience has been like, serving on this committee?

Ann DuPre: Gee, just the companionship – the wonderful ladies on this committee have just enriched my life. I think we have stayed connected and I envision us staying connected as long as we are able to stay connected. There were so many different aspects to the board and I think the whole group together – the mix – has just been wonderful. They're a smart group, they're very caring, and it's just a pleasure to work with them.

Dr. Disney: What do you remember about some of the Mothers of the Year that were selected or the selection process of reading applications and making those decisions?

Ann DuPre: Oh goodness, well we had some awesome ladies and sometimes it was just really, really hard because they had such rich lives and had what we were looking for. Yeah, it was difficult but I came on late, I came on five years ago so there was only two years of selecting mothers when I was there. I have met so many wonderful ladies that were chosen before I was a part of the committee and they are a very impressive group.

Dr. Disney: You may have already answered this but I was going to ask you how did your membership on this committee impact you and your family and your community?

Ann DuPre: Well I think it's definitely enriched my life and it's been a pleasure to work on this.

Dr. Disney: So, I want to switch gears a little bit and ask you some thematic questions that kind of relate to your own life story and your own life experience about balancing work and family, those kinds of issues. So let me start more generally, what do you think are the most important issues facing women today?

Ann DuPre: Yeah, I've put some thought into this. I think equal pay for equal work is very important. I would like to see the domestic violence laws strengthen, I would also like to see more women in elected positions – I think women have an awful lot to offer and I'd like to see more women contributing in that aspect. Um goodness, what else?

Dr. Disney: That's good, those are some really important issues, I think, in the state of South Carolina and nationally and internationally. Do you think women's work and women's roles as mothers are adequately recognized by society today?

Ann DuPre: I think it's better but I don't think we're there yet.

Dr. Disney: What do you think we could do? Is there anything we can do? I mean, you've been a part of this great committee that actually did recognize the Mother of the Year in South Carolina and there is a national board of recognized Mothers of the Year. What do you think we can do as a society to try to truly value and recognize the work of mothers and working mothers, working inside of the home and outside of the home?

Ann DuPre: That's a good question.

Dr. Disney: It is tough, right?

Ann DuPre: I think sometimes women when they do awesome things, they don't get the recognition that a man gets and I would think the media could do quite a bit for that. I've seen women just sort of say, "Well that's...y'know" – they may have done something equal to a man but it's downplayed.

Dr. Disney: You've spoken a little bit about this earlier and talking about your trajectory but I'm going to ask you to say a little bit more about it. What were some of the challenges you faced when you were raising your child in terms of thinking about balancing and being able to balance your work as a teacher and your work outside the home and your work inside the home, with your family?

Ann DuPre: Well, I do think it's better now. I think it was difficult to me because my husband was gone so much. I mean, there were spells there where he would go have to work in New Hampshire or Washington and he was gone five days a week so I was almost a single mom in that way, I had a lot of support from my husband and my daughter knew we were a team in raising her but having him gone so often made it difficult.

Dr. Disney: What did he do for a living?

Ann DuPre: He was an engineer – he did a lot of consulting work and during the Reagan era, a lot was going on in Washington so he was up quite often. They had a Washington office, an office in New Hampshire and he was flying up there right after Hugo, which was very difficult because they sent him up there to New Hampshire to run that office. And so we were doing repair work and it was just a lot going on and I also see now, I watch how things worked in raising my daughter and how my daughter and son-in-law raise my granddaughter and I think the guys today are more in tune with doing more of the housework, more with the babies and with the children than our generation was – I think we were a kind of transitional generation. You

know, we worked but we were still thought of as “women in the home” and I think we were trying to juggle two things.

Dr. Disney: You’ve kind of answered my next question too, which is about women today. Do they face similar challenges or different challenges than you faced? It sounds like you think things have gotten better in that regard.

Ann DuPre: They’re better. I don’t think they’re there yet, but I think they’ve definitely improved.

Dr. Disney: What does feminism mean to you, Ann?

Ann DuPre: Um, I’m not sure. Could you tell me your definition of feminism? That word has gotten a bad rep, I think.

Dr. Disney: I think it has gotten a bad rep, so here’s what I’d like you to do. Why don’t you tell me one of the different possible connotations that you’ve heard. Like when you hear the word “feminism”, what do you associate with that?

Ann DuPre: Well, I think they’re been some radical women out there that have given it a bad face but I really want those issues I mentioned earlier, I think they’re very important and I don’t want women to take a backseat ‘cause somebody has been very vocal and maybe not handled this issue properly.

Dr. Disney: And you ask me what do I think and at a minimum, I think feminism is about equality, equality for women and men. So when I heard the issues that you raised – equal pay for equal work, strengthen domestic violence laws, get more women elected to public office – to me those are all really feminist issues. If someone is supporting equal rights for women and men, they would support those issues as well.

Ann DuPre: Right.

Dr. Disney: I agree with that. Do you consider yourself a feminist?

Ann DuPre: I’m very pro-issues. I don’t think I would get out there and march or something but I would do anything to support that, that gives it a good face and can move these issues forward.

Dr. Disney: Well first before I ask, do you have any questions for us or do any members of our team have any follow up questions you’d like to ask Ann? Have we missed any additional questions? We’re lucky, we’re blessed to have members of the South Carolina Mothers committee with us so I want to give a chance for anyone else to throw in, do you have any questions?

Voice from Audience: I would like to know the most important lesson you have for your daughter and more important, your granddaughter as far as the kind of woman you would like for her to be?

Ann DuPre: Oh absolutely, I want them to be strong women and my daughter has already gone in that direction and when she was even choosing godmothers for my granddaughter she said, “I want Eliza to have strong women in her life that will lead her in that direction.”

Dr. Disney: That’s beautiful.

Ann DuPre: I think they’re on a good path and I hope everything continues the way it is.

Dr. Disney: Many of us in the room, as mothers, have spoken about that. I’m the mother of a son, I don’t have a daughter but I know some of the women in the room that are also mothers of daughters say the same thing, that they don’t want their daughters to think that they are second to anybody else or need to submit their dreams and aspirations, their wills, rather the idea of a partnership. Do you see it that way?

Ann DuPre: Absolutely, it is a partnership and it is very upsetting to see women take a backseat, take a role where the husband is in control of everything and you know that still happens today. They're missing – there's so much more to life than being subservient to a man.

Dr. Disney: Yes, that is so important. You're changing that by raising a strong daughter and a strong granddaughter. That's so important.

Ann DuPre: Well thank you. We'll keep on with that tradition.

Dr. Disney: Are there any questions that you have for us that you'd like to raise or any additional comments you'd like to share?

Ann DuPre: I can't think of anything. I think y'all have really covered this well and again, thank you for doing this – I just love what Winthrop's doing.

Dr. Disney: Thank you. We're so pleased to add your story and the stories of the other committee members and the other mothers to the Louise Pettus Archives oral history and if you think of anything else you'd like to share, let us know.

Ann DuPre: I will.

Dr. Disney: We're travelling the great state of South Carolina to conduct these interviews so we're going to come back through Charleston at least one more time.

Ann DuPre: Well isn't that fun?

Dr. Disney: It is, it's a beautiful state.

Ann DuPre: It really is. And you know, I think not only this committee but other volunteer work with women's organizations in particular are very enriching and have done a lot.

Dr. Disney: That is something I want to ask you about. You talked about being a teacher for thirty-five years and balancing raising a daughter, were you also able to engage in community activities, volunteerism like this, other things as well?

Ann DuPre: Right, well it was very limited while I was teaching. I was on a board for house operation of Tri Delta sorority because that was my sorority in college and we basically ran the Tri Delta house at the college and I'll tell you why I did that was my daughter was a teenager and I knew she was going to college and I thought, "I want to see what are college girls like." And we worked with the girls and that was an interesting experience. Of course, I taught Sunday school and we did a few things like that. I really couldn't give that much. Once I retired, I did a good bit of work developing an education program for the Colonial Dames – we have a museum property which is Powder Magazine downtown. And I worked with the College of Charleston, went to my old pals there, and we established a scholarship for students who created lesson plans. Then I was doing some work with SCTV on a documentary and they saw the lesson plans we have at the Powder Magazine and they said, "This is wonderful stuff – we want all that you have." So I started doing work, really networking, and bringing the college, the Powder Magazine which belongs to the Colonial Dames, and SCTV together. We have expanded a scholarship at Winthrop University and they're going to replicate what the college has been doing so they will be contributing to SCTV lesson plans, basically South Carolina history.

Dr. Disney: So you've been working with the College of Education on that project?

Ann DuPre: College of Education at Winthrop, right.

Dr. Disney: That's wonderful. I want to go back to one thing, you talked about in your day how women didn't really have the same opportunities that men had and you always wanted to be a teacher and you able pursue that path. Did you have any dreams, goals, or aspirations that you were not able to pursue because you're a woman?

Ann DuPre: Not really because I went straight into education. I think it didn't occur to me. I would love to see what I would do now with all of the career choices. I mean it was basically nursing, teaching, a librarian, I mean I kept looking at it and education was the best fit for me.

Dr. Disney: So even your desire to be a teacher, you could say, was potentially structured by the limited opportunities or roles that were presented to you.

Ann DuPre: It was.

Dr. Disney: That's very interesting.

Ann DuPre: Yeah, I mean I knew in my family it was very important to finish college and so I looked at what was there and it wasn't – there wasn't anything beyond that.

Dr. Disney: What year did you graduate college?

Ann DuPre: 1968. And I was really, that was the kind of the end of that mindset.

Dr. Disney: Yeah, that was a tumultuous time in our nation. So many things were happening in 1968 and it was a time of a lot of change.

Ann DuPre: Right, it really was. It came slowly to South Carolina, it was really moving a lot faster in other parts of the country.

Dr. Disney: I think that's absolutely right. The change of what you may have seen was happening in Washington DC, with the protests and marches – the change travels differently in different regions.

Ann DuPre: Right, and I went and looked – well my sister was at Carolina eight years later and in the same sorority and all. I mean, we dressed up and you know, a few years later everybody was in jeans and they were hiding their sorority pins.

Dr. Disney: That's something else some of the women on the committee have talked about. How there are some things that are changing across the generations, for good and for bad, and earlier you were talking about husbands and wives being full equal partners in the family and you said, "My generation was a transition generation" and things getting better in that regard. Could you talk a little bit about other things we've lost, like how have things gotten better and has anything gotten worse in terms of these transitions for women and men and their relationships, or you were talking about dress...?

Ann DuPre: Yeah, well then I look at my age and maybe I should give a little more slack. You know, it's kind of nice to be pretty casual and I think to go some places where we had to dress up and now it's kind of nice to wear something comfortable. But yeah, I guess maybe being Southern and seeing a lapse in manners and that aspect, I kind of hate to see some of that go, civility.

Dr. Disney: What do you think it means being Southern?

Ann DuPre: Oh my goodness, well thank goodness I love being Southern. I can't imagine not being Southern. But I really try to look at all aspects of issues and take into account where other people are from and I'm sure they have the same sort of hooks to their region that we have.

Dr. Disney: That's well put. I just want to know, do you think there's something unique or special about Southern womanhood? Or Southern motherhood?

Ann DuPre: I'll tell you what I really treasure is we grew up and we would spend Sunday afternoons at my grandmother's house and relatives would share all these wonderful Southern stories and I often wondered if people in other sections of the country live like that. And I think these stories are just a treasure to have.

Dr. Disney: Absolutely. That's good, I'm glad that you shared that, that's a beautiful piece to have.

Ann DuPre: It is a gift.

Dr. Disney: It is a gift and that's why we're doing this project to share stories and learn from each other and put them in the archives so other young women of future generations can learn these stories.

Ann DuPre: Right. Think we've done it? It's a wrap?

Dr. Disney: I think we've done it. It's a wrap. Thank you so much, Ann.